

**Overview of Documents Used to Develop Fish and Wildlife Goals for the  
Salton Sea Management Program Phase 1: 10-year Plan  
California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
June 11, 2018**

This report summarizes the documents used to develop fish and wildlife goals and requirements for the State of California's Salton Sea Management Program (SSMP) Phase I 10-year Plan. The fish and wildlife goals and targets will be refined based on current biological information, Science Committee and other expert recommendations, and feasibility as determined by site and environmental factors (land ownership and access, water quantity and quality, funding, etc.). This document is intended to provide an understanding of how current goals were reached and how future goals and targets will be developed.

**Documents (in Sequential Order)**

**Water Rights Order (WRO) 2002-0013 – State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB)** water rights order approved the transfer of water from Imperial Irrigation District (IID) to (primarily) San Diego County Water Authority and Coachella Valley Water District for municipal use. It set conditions such as fallowing of land and required make-up water added to the Salton Sea until the end of 2017. This document references the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) incidental take permit (ITP) No. 2081-2003-024-006 issued to IID by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and conditions for the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) water transfer.

**California Endangered Species Act (CESA) Incidental Take permit No. 2081-2003-024-006 IID/SDCWA Transfer Project-Quantification Settlement Agreement (2004)** – This is the permit for the Farm to City water transfer resulting in decreased inputs to the Salton Sea. Mitigation water was required to be added by IID until end of 2017. Permit requirements affect a variety of fish and wildlife, and some of the permit conditions must be carried out at/near the Salton Sea, such as maintaining connectivity for pupfish and supporting residual Brown Pelican populations.

**Chapter 13 Salton Sea Restoration Act of 2003** – Sections 2930-2945 of the California Fish and Game Code are known as the Salton Sea Restoration Act of 2003. In this chapter there are several declarations that influence fish and wildlife targets. Chapter 13 declares that the preferred alternative shall provide the maximum feasible attainment of the restoration of long-term stable aquatic and shoreline habitat for the historic levels and diversity of fish and wildlife that depend on the Salton Sea. For the purpose of the restoration plan, the Salton Sea ecosystem shall include, but is not limited to, the Salton Sea, the agricultural lands surrounding the Salton Sea, and the tributaries and drains within the Imperial and Coachella Valleys that deliver water to the Salton Sea.

**Salton Sea Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) (2007)** – This document was drafted, but never finalized, and many concepts were incorporated in the Species Conservation Habitat (SCH) EIR. The document evaluated potential restoration alternatives of the Salton Sea, and presented a preferred alternative.

**Salton Sea Ecosystem Monitoring and Assessment Plan (2013)** – A Monitoring and Assessment Plan (MAP) was created by USGS to provide a guide for data collection, analysis, management, and reporting to inform management actions for the Salton Sea ecosystem. Information derived from monitoring activities was to be used to guide the initial designs and management of restoration actions. Monitoring will help ensure the success of management actions by identifying actions that are not having the desired effect so that they can be adjusted. The MAP was intended to establish baseline conditions for the Salton Sea ecosystem, metrics against which data gathered during long-term monitoring can be compared, identify and prioritize filling of existing data gaps, and store, manage, and make monitoring data publicly available in a timely manner. This monitoring plan framework will be used in the development of a SSMP Phase 1 MAMP.

**Salton Sea Species Conservation Habitat EIR/EIS (July 2013)** – The Species Conservation Habitat (SCH) ponds are designed to accommodate piscivorous bird species that will experience significant declines when the quality of Salton Sea habitat deteriorates substantially in the near future. While the SCH ponds would provide ancillary benefits for other bird species, they are not the principal species served by the SCH Project. The ponds have not yet been built.

The SCH Project is designed as a “proof-of-concept” project in which several project features, characteristics, and operations could be tested under an adaptive management framework. Features and information learned during the design of the SCH that may be applicable to future projects include basic design characteristics, pond unit type, berms, depth contouring, pupfish connectivity, sedimentation basins, bird habitat features (nesting and roosting structures for piscivorous birds), and fish habitat features.

**Species Conservation Habitat MAMP (2015)** – The monitoring and adaptive management plan (MAMP) describes project objectives, defines expected or desired outcomes, and describes monitoring activities to track progress toward objectives and compliance with regulatory permits during the initial implementation phase. The effectiveness of SCH Project actions will be assessed by measuring physical and biological indicators of expected or desired project outcomes. The monitoring protocols are consistent with the overarching framework of the Salton Sea MAP. A decision-making framework will guide recommendations to SCH managers for maintaining or adjusting operations. This monitoring and adaptive management plan framework will be used in the development of a SSMP Phase 1 MAMP.

**Salton Sea Task Force Agency Actions (May 2015)** – Governor Jerry Brown created a Salton Sea Task force and appointed Bruce Wilcox as assistant secretary for Salton Sea policy at California Natural Resources Agency. The State is obligated to meet a short-term goal of 9,000 acres to 12,000 acres of habitat and dust suppression projects, and set a medium-term plan to construct 18,000 acres to 25,000 acres of habitat and dust suppression projects.

**Memorandum of Understanding By and Between the United States Department of the Interior and the State of California Natural Resources Agency regarding the coordination of activities to manage the Salton Sea (August 31, 2016)** – The State identifies a goal of 25,000 acres of wildlife habitat, air and water quality projects, and other projects as necessary to minimize human health and ecosystem impacts at the sea through 2025. The agencies acknowledge this goal as critical and a common target to work towards.

**Water Rights Order 2017-0134 (November 7, 2017)** – The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB), through Stipulated Order WRO 2017-0134 revising WRO 2002-0013, identifies restoration milestones necessary to address public health and environmental concerns during Phase 1 of the SSMP. In addition to the currently planned and funded habitat projects (Red Hill Bay, Torres Martinez Wetlands and Species Conservation Habitat) and all QSA JPA Funded Salton Sea Mitigation projects, annual and cumulative targets for habitat and dust suppression projects are described. These targets are defined for each year, ranging from 500 acres by January 1, 2019 to a cumulative 29,800 acres by January 1, 2029, with a minimum 50% of the area being designated for fish and wildlife habitat projects.

**SSMP Phase 1, 10-year plan (2017)** – The Salton Sea Management Program (SSMP) has developed a 10-year plan for Phase I that envisions a range of activities for habitat creation and dust management as the Salton Sea recedes over 2018-20280. In Chapter 4- Habitat Design and Implementation for Fish and Wildlife Resources, general fish and wildlife goals are identified supporting the creation of habitat for a wide variety of fish and wildlife resources. Habitat components will present diverse habitat usage opportunities for bird and other species that use the Salton Sea ecosystem. This work plan describes the future development of Habitat Design Criteria, and a Monitoring and Adaptive Management Plan.

**Habitat Design Criteria (2018)** – Draft document developed by CDFW that describes broad criteria addressing physical habitat design of SSMP projects for fish, wildlife and aquatic biota to meet the Habitat Goals described in the SSMP Work Plan. Habitat constructed for the SSMP potentially includes mudflats and shallow saline water, mid-depth saline water, deep saline water, and permanent vegetated wetlands. Criteria is given for depth, bathymetry, habitat size, flow, connectivity, structure for birds, vegetation, sedimentation and water quality factors, including salinity, temperature,

dissolved oxygen, nutrients, and selenium. Presented to the Science Committee in January 2018. Comments provided by the Science Committee in March 2018. Revisions in process.

### **Current Goals and Targets**

CDFW current targets are guided by the various legislation and permits that have been issued such as the Salton Sea Restoration Act of 2003, which is intended to protect and provide long-term conservation of fish and wildlife that are dependent on the Salton Sea ecosystem, restore the long-term stable aquatic and shoreline habitat for fish and wildlife that depend on the Salton Sea, protect water quality, and maintain the Salton Sea as a vital link along the Pacific Flyway.

The Salton Sea Task Force Agency Actions (May 2015), set a short-term goal of 9,000 acres to 12,000 and a medium-term plan to construct 18,000 acres to 25,000 acres of habitat and dust suppression projects. These goals were further refined in 2017 by the stipulated order revision WRO 2017-0134. Milestones are set for each year during Phase 1, beginning with 500 acres of habitat and dust-suppression projects constructed by January 1, 2019. The acreage requirements increase to 4200 acres of habitat and dust-suppression by January 1, 2029, a cumulative 29,800 acres.

No less than 50% of the acreage described shall provide habitat benefits for fish and wildlife that depend on the Salton Sea ecosystem. Projects that provide habitat benefits for fish and wildlife do not include dust control projects that involve surface roughening, vegetation enhancement and surface stabilization. These targets are in addition to the previously planned projects (Red Hill Bay, Torres Martinez Wetlands, Species Conservation Habitat, and QSA mitigation). In addition to targets which are dictated through the State Water Resources Control Board, fish and wildlife goals must be consistent with the QSA ITP Permit conditions that will be carried out on the Salton Sea. Mitigation measures required by the QSA which take place near the Salton Sea footprint include the creation of a pupfish connectivity channel, Brown Pelican roosts sites and protection of tern nesting areas.

### **Goals and Targets Refinement**

Goals and targets identified in existing documents will be refined and enhanced during the initial period of the SSMP Phase 1 10-year Plan. In 2018, habitat design criteria were drafted to build upon existing design information. Based on anticipated SSMP Phase 1 project areas, current biological information, Science Committee and other expert recommendations, and feasibility, additional refinement of fish and wildlife goals and targets will be developed to inform habitat design, construction, operation, monitoring and adaptive management plans and actions. Goals and targets will be developed to achieve a diversity of species that depend on the Salton Sea within the framework of SSMP projects. Information learned from habitat projects constructed in the area will be incorporated to understand what is successful or feasible to create in future projects. As goals and targets are refined, draft documents will be developed and provided to the Science Committee for review.

### **Conclusion**

Many documents and orders have been created in the past 16 years informing State actions to create fish and wildlife habitat and dust suppression projects. The development of focused fish and wildlife goals and targets that guide the amounts and types of habitat created to support the diversity of species that use the Salton Sea are based on the regulatory, management, and monitoring documents identified above. Biological information and input from the Science Committee members will guide the refinement of goals and targets to support the variety of fish and wildlife using the Salton Sea and also achieve broader SSMP goals.

## **References**

California Endangered Species Act (CESA) Incidental Take permit No. 2081-2003-024-006 IID/SDCWA Transfer Project-Quantification Settlement Agreement (2004)

*available at* <https://www.iid.com/home/showdocument?id=2281>

Fish and Game Code – Division 3 – Chapter 13 Salton Sea Restoration Act- Sections 2931-2945 (2003)

*available at*

[https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes\\_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=FGC&division=3.&title=&part=&chapter=13.&article=2](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=FGC&division=3.&title=&part=&chapter=13.&article=2).

Memorandum of Understanding By and Between the United States Department of the Interior and the State of California Natural Resources Agency regarding the coordination of activities to manage the Salton Sea (August 31, 2016)

*available at* <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/press-release/mou-doi-cnra-saltonsea-signed.pdf>

Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Program Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (2007) *available at* <http://wdl.water.ca.gov/saltonsea/peir/draft/>

Salton Sea Ecosystem Monitoring and Assessment Plan (2013)

*available at* <https://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2013/1133/pdf/ofr20131133.pdf>

Salton Sea Species Conservation Habitat Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (August 2011)

*available at* [https://www.water.ca.gov/LegacyFiles/saltonsea/docs/eir2011/Part%20I\\_Draft%20EIS-EIR.pdf](https://www.water.ca.gov/LegacyFiles/saltonsea/docs/eir2011/Part%20I_Draft%20EIS-EIR.pdf)

Salton Sea Species Conservation Habitat Project Final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (July 2013)

*available at* [http://wdl.water.ca.gov/saltonsea/docs/eir2013/FinalEIS\\_EIR\\_complete.pdf](http://wdl.water.ca.gov/saltonsea/docs/eir2013/FinalEIS_EIR_complete.pdf)

Salton Sea Species Conservation Habitat Monitoring and Adaptive Management Plan (2015)

*available at* [http://ie.califaep.org/images/Program\\_Materials/Salton\\_Sea\\_Management\\_Plan\\_2015.pdf](http://ie.califaep.org/images/Program_Materials/Salton_Sea_Management_Plan_2015.pdf)

Salton Sea Task Force Agency Actions (May 2015)

*available at* [http://resources.ca.gov/docs/salton\\_sea/Task\\_Force\\_Actions-151007.pdf](http://resources.ca.gov/docs/salton_sea/Task_Force_Actions-151007.pdf)

Salton Sea Management Program Phase I: 10-Year Plan (2017)

*available at* [http://resources.ca.gov/docs/salton\\_sea/ssmp-10-year-plan/SSMP-Phase-I-10-YR-Plan-with-appendices.pdf](http://resources.ca.gov/docs/salton_sea/ssmp-10-year-plan/SSMP-Phase-I-10-YR-Plan-with-appendices.pdf)

Salton Sea Management Program Habitat Design Criteria (2018)

*available at* [http://resources.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Habitat-Design-Criteria\\_January-2018.pdf](http://resources.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Habitat-Design-Criteria_January-2018.pdf)

State of California State Water Resources Control Board Order WRO 2002-0013 (2002)

*available at*

[https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/board\\_decisions/adopted\\_orders/orders/2002/wro2002-13.pdf](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/board_decisions/adopted_orders/orders/2002/wro2002-13.pdf)

State of California State Water Resources Control Board Order WRO 2017-0134 (November 7, 2017)

*available at*

[https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/board\\_decisions/adopted\\_orders/orders/2017/wro2017\\_0134\\_w  
ith\\_exhibit\\_a.pdf](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/board_decisions/adopted_orders/orders/2017/wro2017_0134_with_exhibit_a.pdf)